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ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

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**B = BELL
S = STEVE**

LFP MB-R017

B: So you said that Doug had already talked to you.

S: Yeah, a couple of, ah, a couple of months ago. And ah, I remember him sitting down with the tape recorder. I think it was at that desk. And I don't recall the details of what we talked about. But I would imagine whatever we cover today we'll probably be covering some (B: some of it, okay) of the same ground. Yeah.

B: Okay. He probably asked you about the Laos American Organization and so on.

S: Yeah.

B: The way it's set up and what services you provide.

S: Yeah, I would have guessed that. If you want I can review that very quickly for you.

B: Yeah, how about just quickly.

S: Okay. Um, this organization ah, Laotian American Organization of Greater Lowell Incorporated was incorporated ah, in ah, October of '85. And I think soon there after, or maybe that was the date it received it's non-profit number as well. So it's a registered non-profit charitable organization. It's incorporated with the State of Mass, Commonwealth of Massachusetts um, since then. It actually was built on the um, remains if you will, of another organization that had done similar work, but for um, organizational reasons had to be dissolved. And so it's carrying on work actually from about 1984. So from '84 to '87, about three years um, this organization in one form or another has been working. It was established almost exclusively by Laotian ah, but there was a lot of initial input and impetus from ultimately the federal government. Ah, it was their plan and still is their plan that ah, especially um, the Southeast

Asians who came over at that particular time, they were you know, in large numbers. The idea was to encourage them to set up M.A.A.'s, Mutual Assistance Associations. Um, we've been at this office for ah, I think about a year and a half, renting from International Institute. And our basic work is um, there's two words I like to use to describe it. One is multi service, and the other is ah, interfacing. As you see a lot of, I have a lot of computers here. By interfacing what I mean, is basically either interpreting and/or translating, and/or simply explaining all those myriad, mystifying details of the American way of life that the newcomer finds overwhelming. Um, so just to give you a very quick example. A client comes in with a gas bill. He's never seen a gas bill before. He doesn't know how to deal with it. So it's simply a matter of explaining what this is and how it has to be dealt with. That's a simple example. Usually it's going to be something like a ah, ah, [dun] from the Internal Revenue Service for tax forms sent in two years ago. And they have no idea what legalize language means, so we explain it to them. That's our major work. It takes in just about everything we do. We have every specific activities as well.

B: But that, that covers a lot of area. The interfacing, because uh (--)

S: It does. And I would say that's our heart. Although it's not what keeps this office open. What keeps this office open um, are contracts with the, with Boston and with the city of Lowell, ah, for public monies, which ah, by contract requirements mandate that we do certain things. Our contract with Boston, which is the Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants, M.O.R.I., that contract is a very small one. It's basically an operating contract. It gives us money to pay some salaries and some overhead. Ah, the second contract is with O.E.T., the Office of Employment and Training, and that's with the City of Lowell. That's a larger contract, and that is specifically to help Laotian people find jobs. It has a ah, one component of it is E.S.L., or English as a Second Language, but the goal of that element, or that component is the students get jobs. So basically, it's a job program.

B: Now, is your organization involved in E.S.L. directly, or is it [unclear] teaching?

S: We do the E.S.L. Yes. Um, we hire the ah, the teacher. We coordinate it. We do all the reporting for it. We're doing it, and we do it in this hall next to us, which we also rent from the International Institute. [Someone speaks Steve in the background] Okay. That's our second major source of funding. Our third major source of funding is the Gateway Cities Program, which is also um, the City of Lowell. It's, that's state funded money. It's not federal, but it is coordinated through the City of Lowell. And that money was ah, is being used specifically to fund one individual to ah, do intake, outreach and follow up work. And basically that same gal's the young lady you talked to. Um, (--)

B: So that's on an individual basis, that she does?

S: Well she, you know people come in she'll do initial intake. Find out who you are, what you know, and she'll route people to the right person. She does a lot of data entry so that we have an up to date mailing list. Um, she'll do phone follow up and phone contact um, and then the odd clerical job as needed. And her value and it's worth much more than her weight in gold, is that she keeps our data base current so that we can put out our monthly mailing um, ah, of a newsletter, which is very, very informal. And that I see as being the most important aspect of

outreach. Get out to the people. Let them know that we are here, and what we're doing.

B: What, what is the in round figures about the pop, the Laotian population right now?

S: Okay. Right. This is a source, this is a question that is subject to much confusion and several answers. When I first came to work at this organization about nine months ago, I was told by my predecessor that there are three thousand to thirty-five hundred Laotian in Lowell. I have heard figures as high as five thousand. I've heard figures as low as two thousand. I have tried repeatedly from ah, public agencies and other organizations to try to get some kind of figure. And I've failed. So I really don't know. I would guess that we have about thirty-five hundred. That's my figure. That's the figure I use in all my planning. Daily clients, now we average ah, about, about nine, about even to eleven client visits per day. Seven to eleven client visits per day. We average about ah, about one hundred and thirty to a hundred and fifty client visit, unduplicated client visits per month. Unduplicated means individuals.

B: Right. The same person may come back three or four times, and he's counted once.

S: Two or three times in a month, yeah, as unduplicated, yeah. (B: Right) Um, the total number of actual office visits is in the vicinity of two hundred, two hundred and fifty per a month. Some of those of course take only five minutes. Some of them can take as long as an hour, or two hours.

B: Ah, is there any major area of the city for the Laotian community to live?

S: Um, there's no one major area as far as I'm familiar. Um, there are pockets, but I think generally we could say the Acre and the Highlands. Probably most of them are within you know, those two neighborhoods of Lowell. And there are some addresses where I think you know maybe a tenth of the population must live. Like there's a place on Pratt Avenue and another place on Mt. Washington Street. And I just have so many people registered as living there. And I, I do know as a fact that some of those places are large apartments, and there might be ten single men living in one apartment for example. And there might be three or four apartments like that. So there are some places we have a very high concentration of Laotian. And I know that on, on Tenth Street for example, in the Christian Hill area there's one house with three Laotian families. And there's not a Laotian family near, you know within a mile radius, (B: Oh, I see) ah, which is very strange.

B: It's not, it's not the normal.

S: I don't think that's the norm. No. The norm is that they will tend to congregate in upwards of eight to ten to fifteen families in a given two or three block radius.

B: The Highlands, is that near ah where the Temple is?

S: I'm, I'm (B: That's called, that's called lower Highlands, right off Chelmsford.) not that familiar with (--) Right, it's off Chelmsford. So maybe that, you know, that's, you're probably right there. I just know vaguely uh, these two neighborhoods. But I know Frye Street, and

looking at the map. And you say Chelmsford Street. Probably, that's where the Temple is, yeah.

B: Do they have problems with neighbors?

S: Ah, the Temple of the Laos in general?

B: Just Lao in general.

S: Ah, I have yet to hear of anything regarding Laotian per se. None of the people who come in to see me have mentioned that as a problem. I have heard stories about neighbors having problems with Southeast Asians, Vietnamese, or Cambodian um, ethnic group. But I have not heard it from my clients yet. That's not to say it's not there. It's just that I've not heard it.

B: They haven't. [Comment unclear]

S: Yeah, they've not come, they've not come to me about it, and they've not, it's not been loud enough that I've heard from other people.

B: At least in terms of living in neighborhoods they seem (--) [people talking in background]

S: Yeah, they, they're, generally I mean it's ah, their traditional life style in Laos was agricultural. It was a very small quiet, and until the war, very, very, very peaceful country. Ah, they've taken a lot of that with them. Um, they'll party at the drop of a hat. And they like to have a good time. But they, they tend to you know, do it in a way that apparently is not offensive to their neighbors. Um, they do, as do all the new immigrants to the states tend to live in over crowded conditions. And currently ah, we've had a rash of people coming in and saying that their landlords are evicting them, because their living too many people according to the city codes. Ah, that's understandable. Um, frequently I just, you know, I must play the role of advocate to the refugee. Ah, frequently they live in those overcrowded conditions, because landlords frequently will take a cut, or we'll say a hundred bucks per head for example. And don't explain the law to the refugee. Um, so the fact that they're living over crowded in contrary to the housing code doesn't necessarily mean that they're doing it of their own volition. They either don't know, or frequently they're sort of sucked into it because the landlord would say, "fine, you can get any number of people you want here, just a hundred bucks per head." And that's good for the landlord, and it's good for the refugee. Um, and it works. But, now I think the city is beginning to crack down on landlords. And we've had a rash of people coming in saying, "I've got to move, because my landlords kicking me out." That's not a neighbor problem. But I did mention it in response to your question, because over crowding can lead to neighbor problems. And to the extent there is overcrowding the potential for neighborhood problems will arise.

B: You mean like parking? [Few words unclear] people coming and going.

S: Parking, partying, and you know, there's just you know, since there's so many people that are going to hang out on the door stoops. And people you know, neighbors will walk by. And there's just ah, or the kids will be playing, and you know, a ball through the window. And there's

just the opportunity for something, something happening is just more.

B: A little more contact.

S: Yeah.

B: More opportunity.

S: Yeah.

B: Are most of the Laotians here rural background? You said they were farmers.

S: Right, um.

B: I assume they were (--)

S: Right. Um, okay I don't have that much ah, data, but from when I was interviewing clients on a daily basis for job interview, to get them jobs, um, the majority were from a ah, a non-urban environment. The majority would have had between three to six years of education in Laos. That was it.

B: So the culture shock is probably even greater than if they were from the city.

S: I would say very great.

B: Where they've encountered questions, ideas.

S: Yeah, they've, they've had (--) Now, they, they went through their most serious culture shock of course when they survived the war. You know, when they were bombed out of their homes they crossed the Mekong River went into Thailand. And in Thailand they began to learn the survival skills of the American way of life. Ah, part of which of course include I.D. cards, and you know, interviews, and giving name, addresses, and so on. Um, the Laos are I think compared to other Southeast Asian groups here in Lowell, I think are surviving very very well. And the reason for that is they are very, very, very highly employed. I have to emphasize that. They're very highly employed. Um, I would say upwards over 90% of the Laotian people in Laos, ah, ah, Lowell are employed. Um, this of course is very good in terms of the government, because that means much less welfare money goes out to the Laotian. It's very bad for me, because the money I get from O.E.T., which is the majority of my money, is based on getting people off of welfare. So the fact that I can't get people off of welfare means that they keep complaining your not doing your job. And I say, "hey, I don't, I can't do the job your giving me."

S: And the bottom line is they want to cut my dollars. And the real work I'm doing, this interfacing um, and crisis intervention um, you know, it, you know, that's my job of course as Director is to try to, you know, work my around that and find money from other sources to do that ah, and to do our everyday work and say, "fine we don't have people on welfare. I don't have to find them jobs."

B: It sounds like employment's not the large problem.

S: Not for Laotian. Not for Laotian, no.

B: What are the largest problems of [unclear]?

S: Um, the largest problem, and I'm saying this more as a scholar. I would say is the language problem. Um, once they get over that then the whole other gambit of potential social economic problems will fall by the wayside. Ah, that's as a professional I have to say that. As a scholar, and as a professional. The other major problem I see for the Laotian as a community is a direct result of their experience in leaving their homes in a war situation. And coming to America through a refugee camp environment in Thailand. And that is we have a fairly large number of unattached single

ah, probably single, unattached young men. These are kids who maybe left their homes at the age of six, seven, eight. Grew up in refugee camps. Have come to America and have learned to ah, survive that you know, that strange in between world, that twilight zone of not being an American and getting into a new environment. And um, I see a great potential in the future for prob, for legal problems. I'm afraid that some of these kids are getting off on the wrong track. Some of these people are twenty-five, twenty-six, twenty-eight years old. But there are a large number of sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen year olds that are living together on Pratt Avenue, ten kids to an apartment, with no adult supervision, no moral supervision. Ah, now I don't care what your morality is Christian, Buddhist, or whatever, but they're getting no parental supervision. So nobody's telling them that this is a good thing to do, that's a bad thing to do. And ah, my big fear, and I hope it's only a fear, and I hope it's unfounded. But um, my big fear is that could be a potential problem in the future, because these kids could go wrong. I've heard stories that they're some drugs being involved. Some stealing, some gangs, you know like petty theft, car, car, car theft, car burglary. Laotian was killed. He apparently shot himself in New Hampshire about three or four months ago. I've got the newspaper clipping. Ah, he was in New Hampshire trying to close a drug deal. And this is what the papers you know, implied. I don't really know, but the paper said, you know the police suspect drugs. Apparently went up to make some kind of a deal. Some problem evolved. He actually, he shot the American in the shoulder and then in either grief, or fear, or whatever turned the gun on himself and shot himself. Um, he's one of that group of young single um, men that I think could hopefully unfounded my fears could blossom into a ah, very sensitive situation.

B: So that's a problem that really pre-dates coming here. That goes back to

S: Right. And (--)

B: It's the situation of having no parents. (S: Yeah, yeah) Nobody to be responsible to.

S: Yeah. And my hope is that this office um, will be able to (--) See right now those three contracts I told you about, M.O.R.I., O.E.T., and Gateways, that funds 99.99% of our money currently. And I know, as I'm sure everybody in the world knows that the American economy is on a down turn. They're cutting 33 billion from next years budget, and so on. So, and the non-

profit game now is we've got to get our money from private funders. So that's what I'm beginning to do. And I've got ah, a list of things that I'm trying to get funding for. And one of them would be some kind of a program to outreach this group of individuals, and provide them with, I don't know. Right now it's very amorphous in my own light.

B: How you would even approach it.

S: Right. Um, I know one way I'm already going to approach it through the Temple, but it will be approached as a Temple activity. And I can't do that in this office, because we're non-profit, non-sectarian. But, I'm going to suggest to the Monk um, that he set up something like the C.Y.O. Do you know what the C.Y.O. is?

B: Yeah. Christian Youth Organization.

S: Christian Youth Organization. When I was a young Catholic we had the C.Y.O. And I've already

B: It was Catholic?

S: Oh, it was a Catholic Youth Organization.

B: I wasn't a Catholic but,

S: Okay, you heard of it?

B: Yeah.

S: Yeah. So I'm going to say to the Monk um, set up a B.Y.O. A Buddhist Youth Organization. And try to outreach these kids. Maybe starting with the high school kids.

B: You think that's a problem beyond just say the young men who have no supervision? Is there an inner generational split now where you have young people being raised here in this culture.

S: Actually it's good you brought that up. I hadn't thought of that, but this is actually another problem ah, that arises fairly frequently. Um, young kids who are living with their parents and who are for all intensive purposes American, and their parents are still Laotian. (B: Right) And ah, the young kids do things in an American way, and then their parents want to discipline them in a Laotian way. (B: Umhm) Um, we've had a couple of cases from the Department of Social Service where custody of children was, where the D.S.S. went to court and ah, tried to get the child out of the family. And there was one case where the family went to the court and tried to have the court discipline their child, because their child wasn't doing what they thought the child should do.

B: What is traditional or customary discipline within American family?

S: Well see, um, well traditional discipline would be ah, a scolding, a spanking. Um, I saw, when I was living in, I lived in Thailand for twenty years. And Thailand and Laos aren't 100% the same, but I, I did live in the country for awhile. Um, spanking is quite unusual. It just doesn't happen. It's sufficient for the mother, the father and if it gets really serious ah, you know a young teenage guy and a gal getting into a compromising situation. Um, it will go to the village head or the, or the, maybe the Monk.

And usually they'll be some kind of monetary settlement, settlement to the family of the woman to make up for her lost you know, virginity. In fact if it went that far. Or if there was a kid to take care of the you know, he parentless child. But it's usually taken care of within the village ah, context. Um, in the States you don't have that social structure that supports that kind of resolution of the problem. So what happens is you have, I would guess, violent arguments which end up in some kind of physical disciplining of the child, or the child running away from home. And I say I've only had um, three or four cases. Can we take a time out?

B: Sure.

S: Okay. So we've only had about, or to my knowledge three or four cases like that come in. You know where the inter-generational ah, problem, ah, but I do think this is, you know you were very good there Mike to bring that out. It was, it had slipped my mind. It's the converse of the single ah, young men, man without a parent. This is the converse. That is the young ah, person who has parents, but whose parents um, are not able to deal with the fact that their children are no longer Laotian the way they were. That is, the way the parents were when they were in Laos.

B: And that probably includes, does that include ah, religion? Are young people getting away from ah, unclear.

S: Ah, I would say I, quite frankly and I became fairly close to the religion of Buddhism when I was in Thailand. So I any be prejudice and bias in this. I went to a fair amount of religious ceremonies in Thailand as well. My observation there was that it was old people and very very young kids who went to religious ceremonies. I've only been to one religious ceremony here in Lowell. And it was the same thing. But I have noticed a um, a definite gap in understanding the base, what one would normally call basic religious knowledge for you know, for the culture. Any culture has it's basic knowledge. You say certain things of a religious nature and people know about that. Um, I've noticed a lack of that people in their thirties on down. Ah, and I think that result, is a direct result of the fact that they went for many years without this ah, the religious aspect of their daily life. Um, and they've come to America which tends to be officially and commercially a ah, a material non-religious society. And they've accepted those values very very quickly. One of the first things Laotians do when they come to America is get a car. The second thing they do is get a home. Lot of Laotian in Lowell own their own homes. And a lot of them after they make it big here in Lowell buy homes down in Florida where the weather's nicer. So economically their very very firmly set. Of course that's a result of them being highly employed.

B: Yeah. Do they trust American economic institutions though? Like banks, and credit, and I mean that's an extension of our materialistic society.

S: Right. They're beginning to. They're beginning to. Um, they, I think right now it's not so much a matter of trust, or lack of trust, as much as a matter of lack of either knowledge, or lack of understanding. Um, I, I've you know, we just have people who are beginning to establish credit history. They're getting credit cards, um, that's just beginning. But I've you know, the few people that I've talked to that do have credit cards um, you know, he, they, they know how great it is. You know? Um, there is the problem of course like any American of just using that plastic to, to harms end, but I've seen these people using it rather, rather responsibly. I'm impressed with the people I've seen with credit cards. They're just beginning to learn about that. And I think as more and more people establish their credit history, as they pay off their loans on their cars, as they become home owners um, more and more people will be, you know, becoming full fledged and trusting, therefore you know, answering your question, trusting the financial institutions. I don't think they have any real concept about the whole ah, stock market type of thing. You know, the higher echelons.

B: Who does?

S: Yeah, who does? [Laughs] I don't think they do on Wall Street. Yeah, exactly, but um, you know, for the average everyday American Joe ah, Joe Smith, I think they, they have that ah, or they are learning that trust of banks and other credit institutions.

B: What about ah, health and medical?

S: Um, I think the big, the major health problem right now is um, a how should I put this? There's still, American health, the American health scene is so, so, so sophisticated. And they're coming from something that is so, so, so basic. Again it's a lack of understanding, a lack of knowledge. They just have, it's, I don't know how to say this, or word, a proper comparison. Um, there's just so much that's there and they're just not aware of it. They're very quick to go to doctors. No problem with that. They'll go to a doctor immediately. So you know, when they start feeling sick even for the slightest thing they'll go to a doctor. But frequently I think they will take certain conditions that Americans would see as being unhealthy, as normal. They just don't think about it as being a situation for a doctor. Um, and one situation where I saw this happen on more than one occasion is pregnancy. We've had women come in here five months pregnant and have yet to see a doctor. So one of my plans is to do a pre-natal program. Um, and I'm, ah, I'm not married so I didn't know (--) [conversation in background]

B: My wife taught you know, the child birth classes for many years. And she always complained that in western medicine childbirth pregnancy was looked at as an ailment, (S: Uh huh) and treated as such. And that was (--)

S: Okay. I hear what you're saying.

B: Yeah, because obviously in the Laotian culture it's not looked at as, as an ailment. (S: Exactly) It's a natural normal everyday type of thing.

S: Yeah. I, I don't, I hear what you're saying and I, I would not want them to think of it as an

ailment, but I, I you know especially when you come to the, you know the time of birth, ah, the actual birthing, there are ways to do it and ways to do it. And if it's done you know, biting off the umbilical and tying it, and rubbing mud on it as a hopeful antiseptic. You know, that's a practice that in America at least we should be able to over, I think overcome.

B: Are mid-wives used often, or are home births just (--)

S: Um, I'm not really sure. I don't know the answer to that, right now in the Laotian community whether births are done at home, or hospitals. I get the feel, I just, my gut feeling is that it's in a hospital. I don't have proof of that though. Ah, traditionally it was mid-wifery. And, but that was one example. Another example, and I think this is a kind of like these silent time bombs is, and I'm not really sure, I have no figures for this, it's a guess, I'm wondering if there's going to be a problem with lead poisoning.

B: With paint?

S: Yeah, with very very young kids with paint, or with kids going out and eating snow in the winter. Ah, you know with all the lead ah, exhaust from cars going on to the snow. Um, now the reason I think that might be a problem is that Americans are very, very, very I think, aware of this potential problem, and have been for many years. It's been high profile, but it's all been English language. And I do know that there are ah, four or five lead poisoning cases amongst Laotians in Lowell now. Lead poisoning is something that when it, when it begins the symptoms are very subtle. Um, and parents may not recognize them, or may not you know, like the kid may be sleepless, the kid might vomit. The kid might have a headache. These are the kinds of things that Laotians traditionally don't go to the hospital for. Okay. Ah, and they may be the first signs of lead poisoning. Um, so I'm, again I hope my fears are unfounded, but this is, I'm starting to do some work in that. I'm starting to translate materials about lead poisoning. But otherwise I think they're generally healthy people. They smoke an awful lot. Um, and I [laughs], I mean I was a smoker. I no longer smoke, but I find it very difficult to tell somebody who survived bombs, Maikong River and refugee camps, if you smoke you shorten your life by three years, and have him find that what I say is of any value. Um, whether that will be a potential problem in the future for such heavy smokers, that's something else. (B: Umhm, right) Otherwise they're healthy.

B: Which medical doctors are preferred? Just neighborhood, or people they've been referred to or, Asian doctors?

S: Um, right now they'll go to any doctor that they can get ah, coverage for either through their work environment, or through Medicaid. So they're not choosing doctors. Ah, there are a couple of Viet (--) There are no Laotian doctors in Lowell. Ah, there are a couple of Vietnamese. They were going to the Vietnamese simply because they were defacto closer in ah, cultural background. But I noticed a lot of them are going to clinics that are either approved, or part of their place of employment's health benefits package. Um, a lot of them of course go to St. Joseph's, St. John's or Lowell General simply because they're the hospitals that are here. Um, they haven't I think, established the tradition of family doctor. Um at this point.

B: What about traditional medical practices?

S: I (--)

B: Not just Chinese medicine, but coin cupping, and (--)

S: Right, I haven't heard much about that. I, I think some of it might go on. But ah, I just haven't heard it, or seen it going on. Um, quite frankly I personally would like to do a program to support that. Ah, a) to research it, and b) to encourage it, especially in those aspects of it where there is growing western agreement that it might be of um, of worth, or value. But ah, I have no direct knowledge that is currently being done.

B: Okay. I have the name of someone. He was described as an animist, or a [Mordoo?].

S: A Mordoo, okay.

B: C Doctor? Dr. C?

S: Yeah, Doctor C. Mordoo is more of a fortune teller, (B: okay, that's) but they sometimes do get involved with physical, or psychological.

B: The area sometimes between the two.

S: Overlap. [Person in the background is talking to Steve Schmidt] Okay. [Person speaks again] Okay.

B: Yeah, okay. I thought it might be interesting to talk to him, but he speaks only Laotian.

S: Uh huh.

B: I don't know if you know him, but it's [Chung Dow Luen?]?

S: Oh, [Schmidt says the mans name very fast]

B: [Chuckles]

S: Now I know, is that the last name? Or the (--)

B: Well, you know, I never know, because people sometimes tran (--).

S: 30 Brooks, I know that address. We have a man on our clientele who's name Dow Luen, Chung Dow Luen. His first name is Dow Luen and his last name is Chung Dow Luen. And um, if that's the person then um, then ah, I know him, or I know of him. (B: oh, okay) Okay. [Laotian names are spelled the way they sound and are not necessarily correctly spelled]

B: You didn't know about (--)

S: I didn't know him being an animist, no. I did not know he had been, he was an animist. But ah, I'd be perfectly willing to set up something, you know, with you.

B: It would be interesting to do that.

S: Yeah, okay. [Talking is going on in the background]

B: I think these are the sorts of traditions that are going to be (--)

S: Uh huh.

B: Probably gone.

S: Okay.

B: Just judging from work with other groups who come in. And the things that remain and the things that go. It's, some of these things go pretty quickly.

S: Right, right. Exactly, and that's one reason why I wanted to encourage it.

B: What about home remedies?

S: Okay, would you just take time out?

B: Sure, yup. What we were talking about?

S: We were talking about (B: home remedy) home remedy, health and so on. I, as I say I've not heard about it directly, but it's one of the first things to go. Ah, and um, in the large Laotian community across the United States um, there might be people who are still doing some kind of work. I would hope that this organization can help support that. Ah, I say in so far as it's, you know, truly helpful and valid form of doctoring, or of help.

B: Or even just documenting it and letting western health practitioner, non, non Asians.

S: Uh huh. Sure. Sure.

B: Know about the customs.

S: Umhm. Umhm. Exactly, yeah.

B: I think it's easier to work together, [few words unclear].

S: Right, exactly.

B: I don't know if there's a [readicense?] on the part of western practitioners to, well to even

acknowledge [unclear].

S: Well, I think in America there tends to be of course, like ah, there's this big problem. I've not studied this, but I've read about it on occasion. There's what, homeopathy, and then there's chiropractory, and there's all the rest of them.

B: That's right.

S: I think in America and England we tend to be very osteopathy. We tend to be fairly strict on whom we will allow to be registered as a practitioner in the field of health. Um, (--)

This Tape ends

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S: But ah, western medicine and it's, how it looks upon um, traditional forms of treating physical ailments, or even you know, psychological ailments. From what little I've read of the literature, certainly not my field, I think there tends to be a fairly wide spread reluctance on official western part, you know those agencies that ah, registered doctors, you know. I think there's a tendency in America England to look down. Like the Europeans I think are much more liberal in that respect. Ah, and so I agree with you 100%. Some kind of a, um, even just a research program to inquire and document the traditional beliefs and the traditional um, treatments for either specific things, or things in general would be a very valuable thing.

B: Not necessarily to condone their use of, you know, even to pass judgement.

S: Exactly. Yeah, just to research.

B: Just to understand their background. And ah, if they're say, hesitant to accept a certain (S: Umhm) treatment, maybe there's a reason.

S: Sure.

B: A cultural reason.

S: Sure, exactly. Well, actually this is (--)

B: You know, like men don't touch women, you know, in certain places.

S: Yes. Yes, yes, yes yes yes. Very very good! I'm a member of ah, the task force on Linguistic and Minority, ah, Cultural Minorities of The Massachusetts Health Council. And

what we are, this is something we talk about every month in our monthly meetings. And that is the cultural taboos that never come across in translation, but which the health provider that is the doctor, and the interpreter, and the patient should be aware of as they go into the um, into the medical um, interview situation. The way they use it now is the triadic relationship, because you know, some people see it as just being doctor and patient. And, and the interpreter is there as a kind of machine. But in fact it is a triadic relationship. And it's not just simply that the doctor, you know, feeds noise into a machine and that, that machine changes the noise, and the patient feeds other noise into the machine, and that changes it back. But all three parties have to be aware that we're dealing in a cross cultural situation where an American medical provider um, believes that ah, a chemical has a specific ah, cause effect relationship to the body, whereas the ah, the patient, the South East Asian might believe it's a matter of spirits. (B: Umhm) And the way to deal with spirits is not with chemicals, but with incense sticks and bowing before a Buddha image. So this is something that is very important. Now frequently what, what ah, South East, well with Laos and Thai people might do is um, they'll, they'll hedge their bets. They'll take the medicine, but they'll also go to the temple and light their incense sticks and so on. So um, that's something that I think that ah, is very valuable, very worthwhile documenting and ah, in some way making it available to American health providers. It's part of a job I'm already doing with Massachusetts Health council.

B: Are they doing, are they getting somewhere with that?

S: They are. It's, the Health Council is composed of people like myself, people who are working full time already, but have some (--) Most of them work for hospitals and most of them work in interpreter ah, the interpreter ah, office of the hospital. And they're overwhelmed with their work, but we take time off once a month, we have these meetings. And slowly but surely we're, we're getting things done. Um, um, we, I think our major effort last year was we got a, a very significant letter drafted and sent out to Pat McGovern, who ah, is a local state politician, um, who was sponsoring a health bill. And we, in the name the Massachusetts Health Council got a very good letter sent in which we explain the problem to her and said when the legislation is coming before the legislature please consider the fact that you've got to have a line item. Money where hospitals can provide for interpreters. You can't expect to pull a um, untrained house cleaner out of the laundry, and come and interpret for a sensitive medical problem. You need a trained interpreter, and you need a doctor who's trained to work with that interpreter. And another thing we're working on, is we're working on a interpreter's um, code of ethics. And we're also working on a um, training program for doctor and interpreters. You know, doctor, as I say it doesn't go in and treat the interpreter as a machine, but establishes this working relationship with the interpreter and the patient, as we call it the triadic relationship. So these are some of the things the Massachusetts Health Council is doing. It's certainly what I'm also hoping our organization can do here in our own limited way, when I have our interpreters here and I'm setting up an Interpreter Training Program as well. And these are ideas that I'm trying to implement here on a much smaller, less formal basis, because we're a small organization.

B: So are there some interpreters here who are now employed at least on a part time basis for different agencies?

S: Okay. In this office we have a full time, we have three full time staffers, myself and then ah,

the intake outreach worker. And then I have what we call the E.S.L. E.R.S. Aide. That's the person who does most of the paper work for the ah, for the O.E.T. contract, as well as other office support. We have one part time interpreter who works ah, nine in the morning till one. And then he has an afternoon job. I currently am advertising for a part-time worker from one to five. So we'll have the whole day covered. Um, and those, now the one who is now on staff, that part-time interpreter ah, has had no formal training in interpretation. It's just something he began doing and has been doing for a long time. Um, his English is good. Ah, [phone rings in background] not to criticize him, but I think he needs ah, some really firm training in the skill of being interpreter. I've already talked to him about this and my plan is that, for example, it will be an informal program, but invite a lawyer in. And for two or three hours we'll sit down and talk about legal language. Invite a doctor or a health practitioner in and talk about medical language. Ah, I don't have to invite anybody in for this, but just sit down all the people that do interpreting work in this office, which is all the staff because we're all bilingual, and just talk about the ethics. You know, what are, what is your responsibility to the patient. Um, information is personal, ah, confidential. Um, translate only what you say, ah, what is said. Um, if you don't know the proper translation admit it to both sides. Um, if you must make a round about translation inform the parties involved that your making a round about translation. There's a word here that you don't really un, that you understand, but you don't know the technical translation of. And try to find a way to explain it, and let the people know what you're doing. These are what I call the ethics of being an interpreter. Um, and (--)

B: So you have to give up, in some, in some cases ah, your ego.

S: Oh, exactly!

B: And you have to say, I don't know.

S: Oh! You've got to be ah, you know, supremely objective, ready to say I don't understand. Um, and you know, if I as interpreter know the patient, or even the doctor and the doctor says something and I think he means, you know, and, now my duty as interpreter is to translate directly. My feeling as an individual is, oh he really means that, let me say that. That's not, you know that's not the prerogative of the interpreter. The interpreter must be almost a machine. And then if the interpreter does have a problem, because the interpreter thinks he understands a shade different, then the interpreter must settle that between you know, the person who is speaking the language and his, you know, the interpreter him or herself. And once the, you know, a conclusion is drawn then the interpreter can continue his work with the other party, either the patient or the doctor as the case might be. Ah, it's an exciting skill. I've done a lot of interpreting work myself and I'm, I'm quite excited that something here can be done um, in the future.

B: Interpretation goes on on a daily basis, in small groups, families. And I, I don't know, but I would guess that the young people who are going to school learning English who do a lot of the interpreting for the older people in the family. (S: Umhm. Umhm) So in a sense they're intermediaries. They're interpreting our culture to (S: exactly), to older people. Does that do something with the power structure in a relationship, when its, well in the past is the flow of you know, older people. I'm telling you what it's all about. (S: Right, right) Now it's going (--)

S: Right. Um, this relates back to the earlier problem we talked about, the intergenerational gap. And I would say, sure, that manifest itself. Um, it must, and it certainly (--) That's why the, the generation that's having the most difficult time is going to be the older generation. The kids, or people who were born you know, after their parents arrived in the states, they're going to have a much easier time of it. But I'm sure that is causing some kind of problems in families. I haven't had any personal evidence, or relationship, you know, client relationships about that, but I can't help but imagine that you're right there.

B: I noticed when I go into homes ah, the TV is on and the kids are watching (S: umhm) cartoons, or maybe if they're a little older, MTV. (S: umhm) So they're getting saturated. (S: right) And they un, I think they understand quite a bit. (S: Yeah) That you know, the older people in the room, I don't think they really know what's going on, on those, on those programs.

S: Oh, I would agree with you. They probably don't know what's going on. The longer they stay in the states of course, the greater appreciation they'll get, but they'll never understand it as much as their children, especially if their children were born in America and have grown up with that on the TV everyday. Which is you know, in some cases probably what happens. Definitely the kids that are going to high school like wise, uh, you get very quickly culturated in either, well grammar school, or high school. Primary school, or high school. Culturation is very quick. Um, and even though they may tend to stay together in lunch, or even in the classroom with people of their same ethnic group, um, they just interfacing day with you know, non-Laotians. So they're just bound to pick up a heck of a lot more in terms of English, uh English language and of the culture.

B: Is that, is that happening pretty much [unclear]?

S: I think so. [Coughs]

B: I mean they're not isolated, or being (--)

S: There's only forty Laotians at Lowell High School. And um, they're spread over four years of high school and I don't know how many rooms. In the Lowell High School, I think all of Massachusetts, the way it works as I understand is there's what they call the bilingual program, and then there's the mainstream program. For those kids whose uh, English language is weak enough, they are in the bilingual program where they will have some classes in their native language. And so they'll probably be a tendency for in our case, ethnic Laotians to congregate in those classes. Once they get mainstreamed, um, you know, uh, the chances of their getting in with ten other Laotians in one class are next to no, because there's only forty Laotians in the whole school. And I the the school population, the student population is around twelve hundred at least, two thousand. So they're probably in a class with at most, one or two other Laotian. And uh, everything is being done in English, so they're culturating very very quickly.

B: What about dating, and (--)

S: Um, some of the problems that I've mentioned, these, these parent/children, child problems

have arisen because young girls are dating non-Laotian, either Cambodian, or American. Um, for a man to do that, or for a young guy to do that it's going to be less of a problem. I've also seen many young Laotian men who are dating American girls, or American women. Um, uh, that is happening for sure. That is happening.

B: Frowned on by ?

S: If a guy, if a young guy has an American, or a non-Laotian girlfriend, it's not frowned on as much. If it's a young Laotian woman who has a non-Laotian boyfriend, it's frowned on very much. Or at least the experience that I've had. The, these you know, cases that I've had come in. It's, it's very much frowned on.

B: You also mentioned Cambodian, Laotian [unclear].

S: Yeah. One guy, one woman was going with a Cambodian guy. Um, you know, a young high school girl had a Cambodian boyfriend.

B: And that's looked on about the same as the (--)

S: Oh they, well that's the one where I think the DSS had to come in and take the girl away. Because the, the father um, whether it went to violence, I don't know, you know, beating I don't know, but the father got extremely upset and apparently it was, I don't know how, noisy enough that the DSS found out about it, and came in and tried to regulate the situation. I don't know the (--) Well what actually happened I think, in that particular case, just to give you an example of how it gets followed up, is that the girl went to Texas to live with her aunt. (B: Wow!) And I, the parents were apparently satisfied with that, but the idea was get them, get her away from her Cambodian paramour. Uh, and I don't know the situation in her aunt's home in Texas. Whether there were no Cambodians or whatever, or whether they would you know, be very very strict, not let her out of the house. Uh, probably the, if, I'm only guessing now, I'm just guessing that that boyfriend was from high school, because she was a high school age kid. Um, maybe there are no Cambodians in that town in Texas where she is living.

B: Mm, could be though.

S: Yeah. Yeah.

B: It's interesting. Are the, the kids who are being born here learning Laotian and English? That's (--)

S: Uh, that's, it's another uh, how should I say it. It's another one of my pet projects if you will. And that is to teach Laotian to the young kids. (B: Umhm) Um, I was at the meeting of the Laotian Club at Lowell a couple of weeks ago. And there's only about ten or fifteen young Laotian kids there, guys and girls. And I was giving my [shpiel?], whatever I was talking about. And after about ten or fifteen minutes of speaking in Laos, I turned to this young Laotian woman who was sitting sort of on my side, a couple of chairs away. It turned out she was the secretary. And I said, "why aren't you, why aren't you taking notes?" And she said, "I don't understand

what you're saying." So I had to conduct the rest of the meeting in both languages, um, because there were some Laotian there who had recently arrived in the states, and didn't speak sufficient English to understand what I was saying. So there are young Laotian people who don't understand their language. Um, it's sufficient enough to even under you know, (--) Now of course I'm sure when she's home, and here parents are talking about you know, clear off the table, or who's in the bathroom, or I'm going out, you know, they understand that. But when you start talking about you know, something a little bit more formal, um, about making plans, and setting up a club, and taking a vote, and recording the minutes of the meeting, they're totally lost. You know, they're basic gut level, market place survival Laotian, with their families in the house, good, bad, come here, go there, answer the phone. That's it.

B: What about food? Customs?

S: Um, they've managed quite nicely to, ah, the Laotian have managed quite nicely to keep their own culinary traditions, which is very good, because the food in my opinion is very very good. Um, there are many um, there are two stores in Lowell, grocery stores, that are owned and run by Laotian people. A bulk, the bulk I would imagine, I would guess of the you know, the foods that they sell, not a bulk, but a lot of foods that they sell come from Thailand. And Thai, Thailand and Laos are neighboring countries. The culture is you know, the same culture. The food is very very similar. Not 100% similar, but enough similarities that um, a lot of the canned and boxed food goods that Thailand produces for export uh, are being exported to the states and are being purchased by Laotian people here in Lowell, or in other places in the states. Um, also because Lowell is closed to Boston, and Boston has a very strong Chinese community. And the Chinese community has a lot of grocery stores and so on. Um, those, the kinds of things that the Chinese people uh, um, use in their food preparation are similar and useful to Laotian. So they have been able to uh, keep their, their uh, eating habits just as if they were in Laos. It's very very nice. It's very healthy food. Much better I think than American food. Much more healthier than American food.

B: There's not as much fat?

S: Very little meats, therefore very little fat. Um, high on vegetables and fiber. Unfortunately the rice that they're getting now of course, is very finely grained, milled rice. In Thailand, or Laos they would get a more crudely milled rice, which would have the, (B: more fiber) more fiber and also the (--)

B: So even those large sacks of rice are, are more highly processed?

S: I would, the ones I've seen, or the rice I've seen being eaten in Laotian homes is what the average Bangkok Thai would be eating, which is very high refined. Um, (--)

B: It's just like white rice.

S: Yeah, exactly. It's white rice. It's I think personally better than potatoes. I think it's a better form of carbohydrate and starch, than say potatoes, or wheat bread. That's my personal opinion. Um, it's not as good of course, as brown rice or you know, hand milled rice. Um, but then again

they're traditionally not eating a lot of meats. Um, they're eating a lot more veg. They're getting meat. Every meal will have meat, but it'll usually be you know, a 1/4 of a pound will be cut up into small pieces and get spread you know, the stir fried vegetables. And so everybody gets a few pieces of meat.

B: Isn't it chicken or pork, or (--)

S: It could be chicken, pork, beef, and a lot of fish. Now that's where your protein is coming from, is fish. And frequently fresh water fish, which is not as good as sea water fish, but the Laos are (--) Now in the states of course they're using sea water fish, cause it's available. Laos is landlocked, and so getting sea fish was more of a problem. But they would have you know, like paddy crabs, you know, fresh water crabs. Fresh water prawn, and fresh water fish. This would be the traditional ah, protein supplement in their diet. And a lot of fruit of course. They're still eating fruit. Not the same fruit as in Laos. Uh, but they're still eating lots of fruit, lots of rice, and lots of their traditional food, which is high in vegetable and low on meats.

B: Are there, are there people in the community who go out and fish, or do they raise gardens [unclear] in their yards?

S: Oh I know people who have their own homes, they have their own kitchen gardens, they raise their own chickens. The President of our Board does that. I was at his home once. He has a kitchen garden. I didn't notice chickens, but he very well might have had chickens. He had two acres of land down in Bedford. So he could do it. Um, I have seen Southeast Asians, I don't know if they were Laos, many months ago when I was walking across Bridge, the Bridge Street Bridge. I saw them fishing off of that bridge. So I would suspect that they would continue that tradition.

B: Yeah, I live in Providence, and I noticed, the [unclear] especially. (S: Especially, yeah. Yeah.) I know you're, there aren't any here, but they, they will glean right in the city from the ponds in the parks. And of course there may be a problem with pollution in some of the, (S: sure, yeah) some of the places. I think it's hard to convey that.

S: Yeah. I've also noticed there's a lot of, not noticed, I have noticed that there is some, and maybe more than I, I'm aware of, use of sling shots.

B: For birds?

S: Now this is (--) For birds and squirrels.

B: Squirrels.

S: Uh, now this, this is a story I heard about a Vietnamese and/or Cambodian family. I forget which, but apparently, I think it was in Lowell, the trash people would not pick up the trash at the house of either some Cambodians, or some Vietnamese. And the reason was that when they came one day they say in the bags skins of squirrels, which of course the family threw out because they had finished eating the squirrel. And the garbage collection people for some

reason, got offended with that and refused to pick up the garbage, which of course I think is silly. Um, there, I don't think there's any ordinance, City Ordinance, or even State Ordinance forbidding that. Um, but in Laos, in Cambodia and Vietnam, this is very very common. People will sit on their front porches. I mean it's an agricultural community. So it's not like on, you know, Andover Street, uh, or Merrimack Street. But they're sitting on their front porch, and they see a bird. And they get their sling shot, and maybe from the front porch they can get a supplement to their dinner that night. Um (--)

B: My mother and her family has restitutes for squirrel. I mean it's not, maybe people just can't look back at, (S: that far, yeah) in our own history.

S: And um, as I say we've, anyway that's, and I would imagine more of that's going on than, than I am aware of, because I did go to one Laotian family's house for dinner and I noticed, I don't know what it was I noticed, I think maybe it was squirrel skins. And I says, "hey, what's that?" They said, "squirrel skins." I said, "where did it come from?" "Well we shot them with our sling shots." I says, "why?" "To eat." "Okay." I know immediately it would be a problem for any other American. And I don't eat squirrel, but if it were there and it were prepared, you know, if I was coming to dinner and they prepared squirrel, I'd say "fine." You know, because it's all in small bits as part of your stir fried vegetables.

B: That's right. What about the uh, American food? (S: Um) Is that, is that being integrated into the diet, or(--)

S: I don't know. Now I know my own staff have taken to pizza quite well. Um, every Friday, or generally on Friday we'll have a pizza here. Um, hotdogs and hamburgers of course are for all their lack of health benefits, as far as I'm concerned anyway, taste great. And they're very convenient. So I would just imagine that as the high school kids grow up in that environment, they'll probably take to those kinds of things as well.

B: They'll buy fast food and eat it, but I wonder if any are cooking American style at home.

S: At home I would tend to think not. I would tend to think not.

B: So probably the encounter right now is just through these restaurants.

S: Right. Yeah, I think at home they're still maintaining their traditional types of food. Um, if they go out to a restaurant it's going to probably be a Chinese, or we do have one Laotian restaurant here in Lowell. It will be either and Chinese, or a Vietnamese restaurant.

B: Uh, which Laotian?

S: That's called, that's the Asian input store which is on Market Street.

B: Oh, that's Joe on Market Street?

S: Joe, yeah, yeah. There's a little restaurant there.

B: Yeah, he photographed, and I interviewed him.

S: Yeah. Yeah. So um, yeah. So if they go out to eat they'll probably go there, or to the Vietnamese restaurant, or to the many Chinese restaurants that are in the Lowell area. Um, rarely would I expect, or think that they would go out to a place like what? I don't know. What's, what's a good restaurant in the Lowell area. I don't know. You know.

B: Um, well.

S: Speare House I think is the name of one.

B: Yeah, or the Grotto, whatever, where they have Italian food.

S: Yeah, okay. I don't even know that one.

B: Probably the Greek restaurant.

S: Yeah, I doubt they'd do that. Um, yeah. But they'll probably go out, you know, hamburgers and hotdogs, (B: umhm) if they happen to be at a shopping mall and that's all that's available.

B: Well I've noticed, the Cambodian Temple uh, people bring food for the Monks in the morning. And it's, like this morning there were several Big Macs (S: uh huh. Yeah. Yeah) in the, which I think John gets a real (S: kick out of!), yeah because he's a vegetarian and the Monks eat meat.

S: Yeah. Oh yeah.

B: [Unclear]. And things like Mountain Dew. That's a real (--)

S: Oh, they're all big on soda pop, and bottled, you know, sweet drinks. Bottled soda drinks were readily available in Thailand, if not Laos. Laos of course, of course being landlocked, and it was, during the war it was hard to get access. But it was pretty free trade between Thailand and Laos, until about '75 I believe. Uh, and so I would imagine that especially Pepsi and Coke got into Laos, if not you know, the other things like Sprite and Fanta, and so on. But certainly in the states they've taken to that quite well, or quite, quite readily to Cokes and Pepsi and all the rest of the bottled drinks. Some of the sweet desserts, you know, cupcakes and stuff like that, cookies, um, they've taken to that to, but maybe not as much as us. But I know you have an informal meeting of the board, and Cokes and cookies, you know, as a you know, for conducting your meeting.

B: Donuts.

S: Yeah, yeah.

B: What about things like for weddings? You know, are there many traditional weddings when

people get married?

S: Yes, okay. I've been to only one wedding myself. Uh, I have been invited to three or four. I've just not been able to attend them. The one I attended, and I'm pretty sure the ones I didn't attend, tend to follow the same format. It's um, it's a large dose of both cultures. Um, there are certain you know, traditional I don't know, they're called "Basi" in Laos, and they're big tall constructs. They almost look like a Christmas tree in so much, in so far as their conical. Um, and they will be made out of trees, or leaves.

B: They're like small [unclear].

S: Yeah, but they'll be lots of leaves and other things. And frequently money will be put there, or other things. Um, and it's called a "Basi", or that particular thing. Now that's, that's present at the wedding I was present at, and I would expect all weddings. And um, um, can we take a time out. Um, so they have this traditional thing, "Basi", and um, and around on the floor will be set up um, um, bowls, frequently of silver, or you know, if it can be a precious, you know, be a valuable thing. And they'll be um, food. I think there's always like boiled eggs. It's some kind of a, I'm sure it's a fertility symbol. Although if you ask the Laos, what's the egg for, there's some explanation, but basically I see it as being a kind of fertility (--). You know, people get married, have children, so there's the egg as a you know, a hard boiled egg as a traditional thing you'll see. Um, and they'll have, as part of the merit making, there might be other kinds of food which will either be donated to the Monk, or something. And then sitting on the floor, and this is, I love this, because you know, in Laos and Thailand there are no chairs. You know, life is conducted on the floor. Um, you know, wooden houses. And it's a warm climate. You go in and you sit on the floor. Um, and so they'll be sitting on mats spread around this "Basi", the older men and the older women who are the, the respected elders of the community. And they'll be talking, they'll be chewing beetle nut, they'll be doing their thing. And at the door will be the bride and the groom. Frequently the bride dressed up traditional Laos, and the groom dressed up, you know, um, 1980's Miami Vice. I mean you know, dressed to kill. Really super, you know, they dress very well. They've got a very keen sense of style. Um, and once the uh, the chants that are the traditional part of the ceremony are finished, um, they'll be a string combo blaring out you know, decibel loud music, which is Laotian, but the string combo of course is this adaptation from the American culture. And the food of course will be Laotian. So it's this interesting mix of two cultures uh, in that, in the wedding ceremony.

B: Is the wedding ceremony mainly a secular ceremony? You mentioned [unclear].

S: Yeah, in Laos and in Thailand weddings are primarily a secular thing. Um, there's some people have told me here just a few weeks ago that Monks don't go to wedding ceremonies. Now I don't know about that. Although I became, you know, I studied Buddhism a lot in Thailand. Um, but I do remember weddings that I attended in Thailand. The family, the married people, and the whole crowd of people who were joining in would invite Monks to the home. And there would be a merit making ceremony where food would be presented to the Monk. But after the Monk left the bride party would change their clothes and then, then the secular ceremony began.

B: Who would do that? Who would (--)

S: It would still be done at the same house, but the Monk (--)

B: Who, was there a person in charge?

S: Uh, the elders again. And um, it could be the elders uh, you know, the elders of the two people people getting married. You know, their parents as well as other respected elders of the community would be involved. Now when I went to this Laos wedding here in Lowell, there wasn't a Monk. And whether the, the married couple, at the time I don't think the Monk had come to live in Lowell yet. If there had been a Monk, whether they would have gone to the temple to make merit with him, you know, personally if you will, as oppose to as part of the wedding party, I don't know.

B: When you say make merit?

S: Make merit means basically (--)

B: Is it a blessing?

S: Excuse me?

B: Is it a blessing, or?

S: Um, I guess that's one way of looking at it. But basically what it is, it's going, paying your respects to the Monk and giving him something like food. (B: Oh) You know, giving him his meal for the day, because Monks um, as part of their, you know, the Buddhist Monks discipline, Monks cannot take unless it's given to them voluntarily. They're totally dependent upon their lay community for their food. Uh, and the Monk is not allowed to work to make food either, to grow food in the farm [unclear] for example. So uh, the most common way of making merit is to go to the temple and present a meal to the Monk, or Monks, or invite the Monks to your home. And at that occasion, uh, there will be (--) There's usually, they're calling um, take the refuges, take the precepts, and hear a sermon. Take the refuges is just a chant in the Bali language, which says I take refuge in the Buddha, the Darma, which is the teaching, and the community of Monks. And that's a very quick chant that's over in like a minute. And the second one, take the precepts. There are the five precepts which are equivalent to the Commandments. I, I train myself not to kill, not to steal, not to lie, not to engage in sexual misconduct, and not to drink liquor, or take drugs. Uh, and the people will take those precepts. And after that the Monk might give a teaching, um, and after that food will be presented to the Monk as a kind of Thanksgiving for his, you know, allowing them to make merit. So it's not really like a blessing. A blessing is, is a priest who is calling down power of some deity upon these people, because of his power of office.

B: Making merit also implies that the people who are giving, who are doing a good thing, so they're earning (S: good things) merit. I mean is that what, is that what (--)

S: They're doing good and exactly. There's a phrase in Thai, in Laos, the same language, ["cannot transcribe"] "Do good, get good. Do bad, get bad." Um, it's the same you know, idea of course in the Christian religion, you know, you get your just reward. Uh, the parable of the "Seeds".

B: What goes around comes around.

S: Yeah, yeah. Um, but um, in a slightly different context it's, it's being realized. Yeah. It's a good thing to do to support a Monk. It's a good thing to take the refuges. It's a good thing to take the precepts. And when you do those good things, you'll have good things accrue to you.

B: There was an interesting wedding we, we missed. And that was Joe Antonacio's (S: oh yeah) wife's sister who married a non-Asian.

S: I think I heard about that one.

B: He described it to me. (S: Uh huh) It was a real combination.

S: Yes, I did hear about that. Yeah, yeah. Uh, I quite frankly hope that um, I would like to see, well (--)

End of tape